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WOMEN'S OPINIONS OF FIBERS

IN SELECTED ITEMS OF CLOTHING

Preliminary Summary Report

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This report deals with one of a series of studies of consumption of farm products, conducted by the Market Development Branch of the Marketing Research Division, Agricultural Marketing Service.

The research reported here was conducted under authority of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946 (RMA, Title II). The Agricultural Marketing Service assumed major responsibility for the study, with cooperation and advice from other services in the Department and the National Cotton Council of America.

The data on which this report is based were collected by National Analysts, Inc., of Philadelphia, under contract with the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

WOMEN'S OPINIONS OF FIBERS IN SELECTED ITEMS OF CLOTHING

(A preliminary summary report)

By Trienah Meyers

During May and June 1954, the Department of Agriculture conducted a study to find out women's opinions of cotton and other fibers used in certain items of women's clothing. This study was undertaken to measure the present preferences and to permit a comparison with data collected in a similar survey conducted in 1946.1/ This preliminary summary is designed to give timely information on some of the findings. A full report of the 1954 study, including comparison data for 1946, will be published later.

The following data were obtained by personal interviews with a cross-section sample of 2,281 women in the United States. The sample was drawn to represent all women in the United States between 18 and 65 years of age and all homemakers regardless of age.

Items included.--The 1946 study included 8 articles of women's clothing: housedresses, summer street dresses, 1-piece winter street dresses, summer slips, short-sleeved blouses, anklets, raincoats, and aprons. These items were repeated in the present study with the following 7 items not previously included: between-season dresses, summer skirts, winter skirts, sleeveless blouses, long-sleeved blouses, shorts, and summer slacks.

Ownership.--In the spring of 1954 most women said they owned readymade slips, summer street dresses, and 1-piece winter dresses. Two out of three reported owning readymade short-sleeved blouses. A similar group reported owning housedresses. Almost a half owned winter skirts, and about a third reported using each of the other articles included in the study (table 1).

Fiber preference.--For readymade housedresses, summer skirts, sleeveless blouses, shorts, summer slacks, anklets, and aprons cotton was preferred by a very large majority.

About half said they preferred cotton for summer street dresses and short-sleeved blouses. In both of these items, rayon and acetate 2/ had a smaller but significant following. Nylon also had a significant following for short- and long-sleeved blouses.

1/ U. S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Women's Preferences Among Selected Textile Products, U. S. Dept. Agr., Misc. Pub. 641, 124 pp., Dec. 1947 (out of print).

2/ During pretest of the questionnaire used in this study it became apparent that many respondents confused rayon and acetate. Because of this confusion and because it was not possible within the scope of the study to try to find out which people actually knew the difference between these two fibers, they were treated as one for tabulation purposes.

Table 1.--Percentage distribution of women who used or did not use selected items of readymade clothing, 1946 and 1954

Item	Percentage of women who used readymade		Percentage of women who did not use readymade		Total	Cases	
	Percent		Percent		Percent	Number	
	1946	1954	1946	1954		1946	1954
Housedresses	59	64	41	36	100	1,782	2,281
Summer street dresses	79	88	21	12	100	1,782	2,281
One-piece winter street dresses	78	79	22	21	100	1,782	2,281
Between-season dresses		30		70	100		2,281
Summer skirts		40		60	100		2,281
Winter skirts		47		53	100		2,281
Slips	87	97	13	3	100	1,782	2,281
Short-sleeved blouses	55	68	45	32	100	1,782	2,281
Sleeveless blouses		34		66	100		2,281
Long-sleeved blouses		33		67	100		2,281
Shorts		29		71	100		2,281
Summer slacks		39		61	100		2,281
Anklets	39	39	61	61	100	1,782	2,281
Raincoats	28	39	72	61	100	1,782	2,281
Aprons	30	34	69	66	100	1,782	2,281

Nylon was most popular for slips. Wool had its largest following among the two-thirds who preferred it for winter skirts. A third preferred wool for one-piece winter street dresses.

Rayon or acetate was most popular for between-season dresses and for long-sleeved blouses. However, preference was expressed for a number of fibers for these items of clothing.

With present merchandising, which makes a number of fibers available at all seasons, it is interesting to note the large percentage of women who did not express a specific preference for one fiber (table 2).

Reasons for preference.--In the interest of brevity and because this study was originally requested by the Cotton Research and Marketing Advisory Committee, only general categories of reasons reported for preferring cotton by more than 10 percent of the respondents will be noted in this preliminary report. Detailed reasons within these categories and reasons for preferring all fibers will be reported in the full report.

In table 3 the general category of "good laundering qualities" includes such items as ease of washing and ironing and appearance after laundering. "Good wearing qualities" includes items such as staying new longer, serviceability and other aspects of durability. "Right weight" referred primarily

Table 2.--Women who bought readymade items: Percentage distribution of fiber preference

Item	Cotton	Rayon or acetate	Nylon	Wool	Mixed fibers	Other fibers	No preference	Not ascertained	Cases
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Number
Housedresses	94	1	1	1/	1/	1/	4	1/	1,470
Summer street dresses	48	17	9	--	3	5	25	1/	2,006
One-piece winter street dresses	5	24	1	33	8	6	24	1/	1,812
Between-season dresses	17	27	1	5	17	15	25	1	685
Summer skirts	77	5	1/	1/	4	2/ 7	12	1/	906
Winter skirts	6	8	1/	63	14	4	11	1/	1,078
(Summer) slips	35	22	40	--	2	2	8	2	2,208
Short-sleeved blouses	50	15	19	1	1	5	24	1/	1,542
Sleeveless blouses	82	3	3	1/	1	2	13	1/	776
Long-sleeved blouses	25	29	17	2	1	8	25	1	750
Shorts	89	2	1	--	1	2	6	1	665
Summer slacks	73	9	1/	1	5	1	8	3	886
Anklets	73	1	11	3	8	1/	7	1/	899
Raincoats	17	14	2	3	6	35	19	5	896
Aprons	81	--	--	--	--	3/ 11	3	5	770

1/ Less than 1 percent.
2/ Mainly silk.
3/ Mainly plastic.

Some percentages add to more than 100 because some respondents expressed more than 1 preference.

Table 3.--Women who preferred cotton in certain readymade garments and yard goods: Summary of percentage distribution of reasons for preference given by 10 percent or more

Major reasons for preferring cotton	Among those who preferred cotton for readymade --												Among those who preferred cotton in yard goods for-		
	Dresses			Summer skirts	Slips for summer	Blouses			Shorts	Summer slacks	Anklets	Rain-coats	Dresses		Summer skirts
	House	Summer street	Between season			Short-sleeved	Sleeve-less	Long-sleeved					House	Summer street	
	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/	Per-cent 1/
Good laundering qualities	91	81	56	87	59	78	78	74	83	73	61	--	89	79	87
Good wearing qualities	41	23	21	18	27	26	17	22	37	40	40	29	38	24	21
Right weight	20	47	46	36	55	26	35	12	29	21	16	27	21	42	33
Good appearance and style	14	34	27	46	--	21	23	28	11	--	--	24	14	21	29
Specific weave	--	--	16	--	17	--	--	--	14	14	--	69	--	--	--
Versatility	--	--	15	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Feels good next to the skin	--	--	11	--	13	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Comfortable in cut and fit	--	--	--	--	20	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Shadowproof	--	--	--	--	11	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Practical, suitable	--	--	--	-	--	--	11	--	--	--	--	10	--	--	--
More generally available	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	15	--	--	--	--	--
Good resistant qualities	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12	31	--	--	--
More comfortable	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	11	--	--	--	--
Good drycleaning qualities	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	12	--	--	--
Inexpensive in price	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	16	--	21
Easier to sew	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	13	16	14
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
Cases	1,385	964	117	696	769	764	636	184	590	651	655	153	329	96	180

1/ Percentages add to more than 100 because some respondents gave more than 1 reason for preferring cotton.

to coolness. "Good appearance and style" included reference to attractive colors as well as general and specific style characteristics.

Ease of washing and ironing was by far the most important appeal cotton had for owners of various items of clothing. This was particularly true for those who owned readymade housedresses, summer skirts, shorts, and summer street dresses.

Style comparisons.--A few questions were asked in which women were requested to compare the styles of certain clothing items made of different fibers.

Table 4.--Women who used specific readymade items: Percentage distribution of replies to the question, 'Which do you think are sold in better styles--(garment) of cotton or ones made of rayon or acetate?"

Replies	Among women who used readymade --					
	Dresses			Blouses		
	Summer street 1/	Summer street print 1/ 2/	Winter street 3/	Short-sleeved 1/	Sleeve-less 1/	Long-sleeved 1/
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Cotton	51	44	--	34	61	34
Rayon or acetate	15	21	22	19	4	20
Woolen	--	--	40	--	--	--
No difference	20	18	22	24	17	25
Don't know	14	17	16	10	12	17
Not ascertained	4/	4/	4/	13	6	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number
Cases	2,006	2,006	1,812	1,542	776	750

1/ For summer street dresses, prints, and blouses, women were asked to compare ones made of cotton with ones made of rayon or acetate.

2/ The comparison on prints was asked all who used summer street dresses regardless of whether they owned a print.

3/ For winter street wear, women were asked to compare wool with rayon or acetate.

4/ Less than 1 percent.

In percentages varying from a third to two-thirds, women said they thought summer street dresses and blouses were sold in better styles in cotton. For winter street dresses, wool was considered most stylish.

Dark cottons.--Women who said they used readymade one-piece winter street dresses were asked if they had bought any dark cotton dresses for fall, spring, or winter wear. A third said they had bought dark cottons in the last year or so, and spoke primarily of good color, style, and versatility for multiseasonal use.

Piece goods.--Women who said they did not use the readymade garments included in the study were asked, "How does it happen you don't use _____?"

Over two-thirds of the women who did not buy summer street dresses said they made their own or had them made. The remaining third gave a number of different reasons for not wearing this kind of dress. Half of those who made their own said they preferred to use cotton piece goods. Other individual fibers were preferred by small groups of homemakers.

About half of those who did not wear readymade housedresses and half of those who did not wear readymade aprons said that they made their own or had them made. For both of these garments, cotton was by far the favorite; more than 9 out of 10 preferred this fiber.

Among those who did not wear readymade winter street dresses, almost a third made them or had them made. For this garment the most popular single fiber was wool, with about a third using wool piece goods. Rayon, mixtures, and cotton were less popular.

A small proportion of those who did not wear readymade summer skirts made them or had them made. Among this small group, cotton was preferred by more than 8 out of 10. For those women who did not buy certain readymade items, the following tabulation shows the percentages who made their own or who had them made.

Among women who did not buy certain readymade items	Percentage who made their own or had them made
Housedresses	45
Summer street dresses	69
Winter street dresses	29
Between-season dresses	6
Summer skirts	16
Winter skirts	8
Short-sleeved blouses	12
Sleeveless blouses	6
Long-sleeved blouses	3
Shorts	3
Summer slacks	1
Aprons	56

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